DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 101 446 EA 006 723

AUTHOR	Anderson, B. Robert
TITLE	Basic Boardsmanship. What Every School Board Member Should Know Series, No. 3.
INSTITUTION	New Jersey School Boards Association, Trenton.
PUB DATE	74
NOTE	76p.
AVAILABLE FROM	New Jersey School Boards Association, P.O. Box 909, Trenton, New Jersey 08605 ($3.50)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.76 HC Not Available from EDRS. PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	Board Administrator Relationship; *Board of Education Policy; *Board of Education Role; *Boards of Education; Conflict Resolution; *Decision Making; Educational Environment; Educational Facilities; Educational Finance; Elementary Secondary Education; Employer Employee Relationship; Personnel Policy; School Community Relationship; Student School Relationship

ABSTRACT

This booklet is intended to provide new school board members with the background and basic information they need to perform their tasks successfully. It attempts to convey a broad understanding of the board member's role, including its scope, limitations, responsibilities, potential pitfalls, and opportunities. Various chapters discuss the organizational and interpersonal dynamics of school boards, crisis management, budgeting and educational finance, students and the school environment, employee relations and personnel matters, and educational policy. (Author/JG)

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WHAT EVERY SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT:

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BASIC BOARDSMANSHIP

by B. Robert Anderson

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P.O. Box 909, Trenton, New Jersey 08605

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Foreword

WHAT EVERY SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BASIC BOARDSMANSHIP is the third volume in the New Jersey School Boards Association's series of texts designed to provide school board members with the basic information they need to perform their tasks successfully.

This volume endeavors to impart a "feel" for and a broad understanding of the role of the school board member—its scope, its limitations, its responsibilities, its potential pitfalls, and the opportunity it offers to lay citizens to make an important contribution to education in New Jersey. We hope it will bring added knowledge to our school trustees as well as an added understanding of the impact of their efforts on the lives of our children.

The association extends its grateful appreciation to the author, B. Robert Anderson, for helping us to produce a volume worthy of a place on every board member's bookshelf.

Mark W. Hurwitz, *Executive Director*
New Jersey School Boards Association

Trenton, New Jersey
July, 1974

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Chapter I

The Human Side of Boardsmanship

Congratulations! You are a member of a board of education and entitled to all the respect, honor, and prestige which accompany the position. Whether you were appointed or elected to office you will soon discern a changing relationship with your friends and neighbors. One new board member could not help but notice his new-found prominence. "Two of my kids have been in Sara Smith's classes. We're sort of friends, even been out together socially. Now, all of a sudden I'm a board member and she starts calling me Mister."

There is a good reason for people to suddenly treat you with a certain amount of awe. Although you are essentially the same human being, a magic transformation took place on March 1, when you were sworn into office. (Elected boards are sworn in the Monday following election.) You have accepted the heavy burden of guiding the education of the young in your community. Your friends and neighbors will allow you a brief spell to get your feet on the ground, but from that point on they will expect you to have all the answers to all the problems which have plagued educators for hundreds of years.

Sometimes board members begin to question themselves and their role. Do late night meetings add to the quality of education? Am I being effective? What do buildings have to do with learning? Are there better ways for youngsters to gain knowledge? Why do I need all these headaches?

The answer to these questions is really quite simple. Stand outside the playground of an elementary school when the children are chasing a volley ball. Watch a group of young men and women carry out an experiment in a chemistry lab. Listen to the faculty discuss a

success story in helping a youngster "break through" to a new plateau. Education is excitement!! And you are involved because you share the thrills and joys of helping to provide the most exciting educational opportunities for the young in your community. You are a member of a board of education and that entitles you to a feeling of pride.

YOU Are Important

One of the first things a board member learns is that he (or she) may not take an action as an individual. Your authority exists only when you act at an open and public meeting of the board. During a stroll down the halls of one of the schools you may be accorded a special kind of treatment, but you have no authority to give directions or orders.

In addition to this, there are a number of constraints on what you may or may not do as a board member. For instance, the State Legislature passes laws which deal with education. The commissioner of education rules on many cases and disputes and these translate into a limitation on actions by local boards. The State Board of Education oversees the actions of the commissioner of education and the State Department of Education. The county superintendent exercises a limited amount of authority. And certainly, there are many restrictions on the board's authority when it comes to administering federal programs.

Beyond this you will hear, with a good deal of justification, that teachers in the classroom and administrators in their offices exercise a considerable amount of control. In the broadest sense this is interpreted as "academic freedom," that is, the right of the professional and trained teacher to pursue his career with sufficient leeway to insure freedom.

Where then does the board member fit into this strange amalgam of controls and constraints? As a matter of fact, the board member may be the king pin, the change agent, the facilitator of innovation. Because, inherent in all these restrictions is the "concept of delegated and voluntarily shared legislative authority." And

this is what makes "boardsmanship" such an invigorating challenge. YOU are part of the steering mechanism which helps these disparate groups come together for the purpose of "providing the best possible education."

When all is said and done, the notion of lay control of education prevails and you are the central focus of the effort to provide the young in your community with vital education. Boardsmanship is merely the style of leadership required to best carry this concept forward.

The Board As A Government Agency

As an "on site" trustee for the schools in your community you are a direct representative of the State of New Jersey. Within the legislative framework the board does control education. To that extent it is a significant body in the whole galaxy of concerned agencies ranging from the national government, the state government, the county government, and even the government of your own specific municipality. Although each level adds inputs to the educational scheme, ultimately the problems in and around education fall on your shoulders.

It is important at this juncture to take note of one of the overpowering problems of boardsmanship. Often you will be subjected to the declaration that: "We ought to do such and such because it is for the good of education in our community."

Beware of this expression. It means different things to different people. Educators, professionals, experts, and board members have been wrestling with this question for decades. Every few years a new theory arises to assault educators and board members, or a panacea is suggested which will solve all the problems of education. Obviously if such solutions were as self-evidently effective as their proponents claim, everyone would subscribe to them. The only thing we know for certain is that the pursuit of excellence in education is a long race. How close we are to the goal line is uncertain, but the race itself is stimulating, and you are now in a position to lead the pack.

Goals and Continuity

A noted college president has said: "It is as difficult to move educators as it is to move a cemetery." There is a good deal of truth in this statement, but there is also a good deal of merit to the idea that education and the educational system have a continuity all their own. Some school districts change more rapidly than others. If the climate of the community is conducive to change, change will occur. How you respond to your community, how you read the signs which point to the need for change is another and more personal matter. However, whatever it is you are doing, your children will have to learn to survive in the larger world. How you educate them to cope with the burgeoning problems of the larger society may well be your most important contribution as an educational leader in your community.

Somewhere between moving too quickly and moving too slowly is the proper pace for you and your children. Does that mean you should always follow other school districts? Not necessarily. Because one of the prime responsibilities of board members is to implement their own idea of the direction the schools should take. Are you on the right track?

In trying to explain this concept to his board one night, a superintendent posed the question: "Suppose you were going to London. Suppose, in fact, you wanted to visit number 40 Bowling Green Lane. And suppose you wanted to be there by November 17 at 10 o'clock in the morning. How would you accomplish this?"

There followed a lengthy discussion of arrangements to get to the airport, flight plans, transportation to Bowling Green Lane, and all of the problems attendant to making such a trip. "Okay," smiled the superintendent. "Now let's talk about where we want to go with our school system."

"That's easy," said a board member. "We want to provide the best possible education for our children." (There it is.)

Another board member answered, "We want our kids to be able to read and write and do arithmetic."

Still another added, "We have to equip them to deal with society."

All noble and significant thoughts, but not the only kind of goals befitting a board of education. Your job is to maintain the continuity of education, to develop goals which are reasonable enough to be accomplished and broad enough to present a challenge. Vague generalities will not suffice. Boardsmanship implies that you will bring to your colleagues some sense of the ongoingness—the continuum of education.

Every board has (or should have) a statement of broad philosophies. These must be reduced to measurable goals and objectives. Within the confines of these philosophic statements boards can determine immediate, short range, and long range objectives.

Here are three questions to ask about every potential objective:

1—Does it have a time limit?

2—Is the end result clearly stated?

3—Do we have a way to evaluate the results?

An example of objectives which are meaningful might read:

"By (date), (percent) of the children will be exposed to a drug training program and exhibit (percent) understanding of the content."

Or, "By the close of the school year, (percent) of grades one, two, and three will have participated in the county-sponsored environmental education program and demonstrate (percent) comprehension."

One management and educational consultant says it more succinctly. "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." The purpose of goals and objectives is to maintain the continuity of education and where possible to improve the quality of education.

Group Dynamics and Decision Making

Since individual members may not take action other than in a public meeting, how does a board of education make decisions? You are about to become involved in one of the most provocative decision-making

systems of our time; you will be part of the group dynamics by which a board of education functions.

The basis for effective group dynamics is that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." In other words, the collective decision of the board should be better than any decision arrived at by individual members of the board. This concept is exciting, but it requires an understanding that every individual has something to contribute. Moreover, it is a positive approach to decision-making. Group dynamics places all the participants on the same side of the fence—it avoids confrontation or adversary positions.

At first you may find this concept uncomfortable. After all, we each come from a background which suggests that the individual is supreme. However, in a group dynamics situation the individual joins with others in a positive sense to seek the best overall result. The individual gains strength by sharing with his board colleagues. When you are involved in group dynamics with your board of education you will find yourself preoccupied and absorbed. It's a delightful feeling.

There are two rules which will help you cope with the group dynamics process as it operates on your board of education. The first rule is to be completely honest. If you feel strongly about a subject, express yourself openly and honestly. The second rule is to address yourself to school problems objectively, not subjectively. That is, don't let personalities enter into your thinking. Speak to the matter at hand—not to the person who has presented the matter.

Whom Do You Represent?

Some people run for board positions because they feel they represent a particular point of view or a particular group. Others may be appointed to the board to provide "balance" or representation from a cross-section of the community.

If you have any idea of running for reelection, or of seeking reappointment on the basis of representing particular interests—forget it!!! Before your first two meetings are over you will come to the realization that

you represent the entire community. Decisions made by the board affect every child. Even a decision to implement a program for the "gifted child" has an impact on the less gifted. Whatever balance your board may wish to apply to these decisions will be up to you and your colleagues. There will be little chance to identify with a special interest group. All groups must be served in the best possible fashion. Many times you will feel torn between programs which you favor and programs which serve the larger need. As indicated earlier, your personal decisions and your reactions in a group dynamics situation should be laced with honesty and objectivity. It's the way most board members respond and in the end it is the most gratifying. You speak for ALL the children.

The right approach to boardsmanship—the appropriate attitudes and methods—can lead to a happy tenure on the board of education. At first, the overwhelming impact, the realization of the importance of what you are doing will cause you to sublimate your personal feelings, but they may emerge later with even greater strength. Reactions from your friends, neighbors, and colleagues will buoy your spirits, and ultimately your individual importance and contribution to educational excellence will shine through. You will find goal-setting and group dynamics to be a mind-stretching exercise. And the proof of a job well done will manifest itself on the faces of youngsters who smile while they learn.

Good Luck.

Chapter II

Organization of the Local Board

It all gets together on March 1 for appointed boards or on the Monday following the board election for elected boards. Each year the board of education is reorganized, and yet the forward motion of education is not deterred. A brief moment is reserved for the official act of swearing in new members, and the election of officers. At a regular board meeting, other actions may be taken.

There is a distinction between the function of a board of education and its structure. The authority given local boards by the Legislature is detailed in broad statements. How the board operates is its own business and this structure can be as complex or simple as the board members desire. The right to govern itself is specifically delegated by the Legislature. This is one segment of lay control of the school board.

Probably the most important piece of business at the organization meeting is the election of a president and a vice president. Healthy boardsmanship suggests that older board members ought to explain in detail what is about to take place. In fact, courtesy demands that a new board member be informed of the natural progression of events before he is asked to participate in the selection of his leaders. There should be little "politicking" for the office of president. However, a realistic view tells us that some board members actively seek and find the position of president very satisfying. In practice, the ranking board member, the person who has served five, ten, or twenty years, or the individual with the most friends, is elected to the top post. Does this make sense? You will have to decide that for yourself. There are no stated rules with regard to the oldest member being the leader and some boards have even

limited the number of years a person may serve in that position.

In many instances committee appointments are made at the organization meeting. This suggests that the president knew beforehand and had weighed the abilities of his peers. If the committee assignments are already prepared this will give you some immediate insight into the person you have elected president.

Board Leadership

The authority of the president of a board of education is no greater than the authority of any individual member. In practice he (or she) is allowed more authority by constituent members because of the need to make "small" decisions. The president is in frequent, if not daily, contact with the superintendent and may counsel or advise him with the fair assurance that the board will back his position. You and your colleagues will be well advised to define the types of "small" decisions the board president may make without your approval.

Management, administration, or leadership—call it what you will—can be separated into three main categories. An examination of these styles will be useful in determining which style exists on your board and which style you and your fellow board members prefer.

Authoritative: Some board members lean back in their seats and say; "We run the schools. We'll make the decisions." It's fairly clear from the body of legislation and the other constraints which exist that the board of education only partially runs the schools. Yet, some leaders (presidents and board members alike) take an authoritarian point of view. When a president operates in an authoritarian fashion, he creates a specific atmosphere. This type of person will usually initiate any discussion of a problem by saying, "I think. . . . . ." Having stated his position the other board members are allowed to add their thoughts, but frequently are afraid to buck the president. Why? No one is quite certain. When you attend conventions or state-wide meetings you will surely hear of board presidents who "lead" in this manner.

Human Relations: A little better than the authoritarian is the person who welcomes other and diverse points of view with a friendly gesture. An aura of well-being is generated, but the inputs of freshmen board members are generally discounted from the outset. This same attitude creates public board meetings where the public viewpoint is "abided." There is little difference between the authoritarian and the human relations styles. One simply appears more friendly. If you feel patronized, you are being made to feel good about decisions with which you disagree.

Participative: A truly participative board is one in which everyone feels free to openly discuss every issue. Actually, the group dynamics of boardsmanship works best in a participative situation. The possibility of threat is removed because board members are meeting together to seek the best possible solutions to problems. This type of discussion will find the president soliciting the opinions of every board member, reserving his own until last. All views will be adequately aired before decisions are made. It's a thrilling atmosphere because each and every board member has the opportunity to make his thoughts known without fear of recrimination. As we indicated earlier: "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

Unfortunately, unless the private and public meetings of the board are conducted in a participative style, the more concerned board member will soon find himself in the position of becoming a gadfly or a dissident. It's an unhappy position but certainly one that needs thinking about. Do you want to be heard or will you remain silent and permit things to pass with which you do not agree? How you conduct yourself in these trying situations is all part of boardsmanship. "Peace at any price" hardly seems a worthwhile goal.

Interaction among board members can often lead to hot arguments. When attacks are confined to issues and not to personalities, board members of differing viewpoints can leave an executive session arm-in-arm, with no one losing face or friendship and admiration for any other. What better way to characterize this attitude than to quote Voltaire. "I disapprove of what

you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Information-gathering for Board Decisions

Before any board can make a decision it must have complete and reliable information. An axiom of business and education is: "The more information, the better the decision." To gather information, boards may opt to use a committee system. Since the board is a relatively small body (five to nine members) a committee of the whole by which members are drawn together to investigate a particular problem is one acceptable method. One advantage to this method is that every member of the board is exposed to the information in the same fashion and at the same time. It's amazing how even under these conditions board members will not agree on what they heard. However, it does give every member the same opportunity to hear detailed facts.

A more widely accepted system is the use of special or ad hoc committees. Two or three members may be assigned the task of investigating a specific situation and then report back to the entire board. For instance, the board member who is in the insurance business is generally asked to look over the board insurance policies. This sounds reasonable, but actually it may be unfair to place him in that position. After all, he may be highly skilled and competent, but he nonetheless has his own point of view. Or take the situation where an advertising executive on the board was asked to draw up a public relations program. He responded by saying to the dentist who was president of the board: "My ideas may not meet with the approval of my fellow board members. After all, would you fix their teeth?"

This flip answer made its point. If the board continually draws on only those people who seem to have "expertise" in a particular area, it diminishes the opportunity to draw on all the resources of the board, the professional staff, and the community. In addition, it prevents board members who are interested in joining a committee but have little knowledge from expanding their knowledge and participation in certain board

activities. In brief, if committees are formed and the atmosphere is one of participation, then members ought to be allowed a good deal of say in regard to the committees on which they prefer to serve.

The executive or working session of the board is a private meeting where problems can be freely and openly discussed. The atmosphere is informal, even dress codes are set aside. Here is where most viewpoints are set and a foundation is laid for later decision-making. Between the private work session and the public voting session many things may happen. If the board is divided on an issue at the private meeting this might be a sign that further investigation and discussion are necessary. However, a public vote in which the board does not come to a unanimous decision is not such a terrible thing. After one open meeting a board member who voted "no" was publicly congratulated by the audience. It was the first dissenting vote in three years. However, once a vote is taken all members must support it.

Depending on the size of your school district—which may determine the complexity of your problems—a briefing session may be in order. Since education and its problems are constant it may be impossible for the superintendent to reach every board member to relate the latest information. Your board may decide to meet for half an hour before the regularly scheduled public meeting for a briefing. Data presented at this time should be factual (and written) and there should be opportunity for asking questions. This is not the time to enter into cross-discussion and the board president should discourage the statements of opinions if, in fact, this is a briefing session.

The type of informal meetings your board holds is unimportant. What is important is that every board member be kept informed about what is going on. CAUTION: Many board presidents favor using a "telephone poll" to secure necessary support for a position. Beware! The secretary who calls may or may not convey all the information. More important, you will be asked to decide without the benefit and insights of your fellow board members. Don't forget, you may be swim-

ming in uncharted waters and the directions afforded by your colleagues could prevent future grief. Besides, any decision which has to be reached that rapidly is suspect.

Tapping Human Resources

One expression which constantly pops up during working sessions of the board is, "We've done it this way for twenty years." Thrown out as a magic wand, this statement is supposed to solve and resolve all problems. All it really does is fill the new board member with fears and trepidation that he is a dope. While it is true that history is a great teacher, it is part of boardsmanship to learn from history and not repeat the same mistakes. Remember, schools used to be built of wood, audio-visuals were unknown, and television had not yet appropriated the minds of our young.

To get at the facts, your board of education has a variety of resources. First, there is the knowledge and understanding of the administrative staff and faculty. They represent the educational inputs which will aid you in making decisions. As time passes you will undoubtedly gain great respect for their professional abilities. Framing educational programs, keeping abreast of emerging ideas, actually teaching children, and maintaining a sense of what is important are part of the challenge faced by professional educators. They are on the firing line and usually are very happy and pleased when board members show that their opinions are valued.

By the way, don't neglect the custodians, maintenance people, secretaries, and helpers in your school system. They offer a somewhat different point of view, one frequently loaded with information not attainable from any other source. Their recommendations ought to be sought and as we shall discuss later, they can easily be formed into a "team."

Out in the community is a veritable gold mine of information. How your parents and other citizens in the community view the schools and the kinds of data they can provide will astound you. If you conceive of this

public as a segment which you are to serve, then surely you have an obligation to listen to what they have to offer. All complaints are not mere carping. Many are a plea for improved education.

Another external source of information is the New Jersey School Boards Association. A highly skilled and professional staff of educators, lawyers, former board members, and public relations experts will respond to your call for help. Then there are the county superintendents and the state Department of Education which has many highly knowledgeable professional staff members. And the expanding Educational Improvement Centers (EIC) throughout the state can provide information on any subject. All you have to do is ASK.

Finally, your colleagues on the board are an excellent resource. This small group will usually be as diverse as the community itself, a microcosm of your society. They will come from different walks of life, represent varying religious and ethnic backgrounds, and have their individual life styles. Tap these resources to the fullest possible extent.

Open Board Meetings

Under the law the business of the board of education must take place in public. When called together as a group the board takes on a new aura—suddenly you become a rule-making, policy-making body. However, what you do is open to public comment and public scrutiny.

To maintain order and decorum, most school boards adopt Roberts Rules of Parliamentary Procedure. You may recall helping high school or college friends put together a constitution. Well, Roberts Rules are generally accepted as the basis for conducting meetings. Boardsmanship requires that you acquaint yourself with these rules.

Roberts Rules provide procedures for properly carrying out necessary motions, as well as for halting action. Motions to "table" are always in order if it is the sense of the board that the time or timing for certain actions appears inappropriate. Depending on the leader-

ship style of your president, these rules may be amended or "slightly bent." Don't confuse a change or alteration in "how" you conduct a meeting with the absolute necessity to act in a legal fashion. Often the two become confusing. One school board met privately and decided to offer a contract to a new teacher. At the next public meeting, two weeks later, the formal motion was made. However, immediately after the first meeting the superintendent had the contract signed. Parliamentary correct. Legally wrong. Who knows what information might have come to the surface before the official action was taken?

Every open meeting—as well as informal meetings—should have an agenda—a detailed statement of the business to be covered and how it will be handled. Agendas and back-up materials should be sent to board members in advance, and should be available to the public. No agenda is complete without supporting information to substantiate action by the board. Even though this information was given to the board in private, it should also be available to the public.

The public may participate in the meeting at the discretion of the board. Good sense indicates that unless the public is given the facts and allowed its voice, it will seek other avenues of expression. The public should be invited to ask questions, state opinions, and offer dissent at a time predetermined by the board. Objections from the floor help the public to find out what is going on. They are road signs to better understanding and should be so treated. If you accept them as personal attacks not only will you antagonize your public, you will be missing a wonderful opportunity to have them share in the decision-making process.

The right, indeed the mission, of the school board is to make decisions. Allowing the community, the professional staff, and outside agencies to offer opinions and suggestions is not an abdication of authority. It's good boardsmanship to involve as many people as possible in the decision-making process. Everyone wants a voice in decisions which affect their lives.

Effective boardsmanship implies a true under-

standing of the limits of your authority. Moreover, it suggests that you understand the different styles of leadership. If you're not happy with your leadership, seek to change it, because the atmosphere created by your president will certainly spill over into the public portions of your deliberations. Along the way you have a responsibility to exhaust the many sources of information available to you. Getting the facts can be easily as important as making decisions. At some time you will be called upon to back up your position and nothing will strengthen your position more than facts. One other way to show strength is to ask and seek divergent opinions. If you listen to only one drummer, you'll march to only one tune. Education is too fascinating to restrict your visions to a single point of view.

Chapter III

The Board and Its Advisors

Probably by now you are somewhat confused by the swirl of activity taking place. The schools seem to be doing their job, faculty and administrators are moving forward, and the new board members are trying to catch their breath. You have a feeling of importance, and yet nobody seems to really need you. What the heck are you supposed to be doing?

Education, despite its high purpose, is still a business. It requires money, talent, productivity, a method to judge the quality of what is taking place, a lot of guidance. The real task of boardsmanship is to gently escort and prod the massive effort already under way. Remember, you can't change things overnight and in the end you may be able to only slightly alter the course your school district is taking. To help you make these decisions you have a number of advisors—experts in residence.

These experts, the superintendent of schools, board attorney, board secretary, and business manager (if your district is large enough to have all these) are there to help you make good decisions. Let's examine how you can become involved in decisions and what the results might be.

At a work meeting a superintendent said to the board, "We have a request from the ABC Drum and Bugle Corps to use our gym for practices. What do you think we ought to do?"

This seems like an honorable request. However, if the board acts upon the request at an open meeting, it must do so by motion. At this point you have to question yourself: "Are we acting in accordance with existing policy? Do we have a policy to deal with this request? If not, why not?" Assuming the board does act on the motion, you must ask yourself: "Have we created a new policy?"

There is another way to handle this question. Have the superintendent make an administrative decision—that is, push the decision-making process down the ladder. Boards should not make day-to-day decisions. Rather, if the problem is not covered by your existing policy manual, appoint a committee to study building usage and establish a broad policy under which the superintendent will have the authority to make the necessary decision. If you occupy your time making these kinds of decisions you'll soon find the board, not the administrative staff, is running the schools.

Another way of visualizing the job of boardsmanship is to picture yourself as in the top echelon of a major corporation. You come together monthly to reaffirm the trust you have placed in your administrative team. From time to time you will give the team further instructions, based on information they and others have presented to you. The difficulty in assuming this attitude is that you must live in the district, probably have children in the schools, meet parents at the supermarket, and are constantly beseiged by citizens who think you ought to be doing something or other. You can avoid most of these problems by listening carefully to your constituents and replying: "The superintendent has the responsibility to do that." Which brings us to the most important single job of boardsmanship.

Selecting a Superintendent

For a number of years school administrators, once they achieved tenure, remained till the end of their days. The rapid growth of education over the last two decades has seen a movement, usually upward, by competent principals and superintendents. Society has been investigating new and different methods of learning and this has increased the demand for experienced educators. Even though you have inherited a superintendent of schools there is a pretty good chance you will have the opportunity to search for a replacement.

We repeat, of all the things a school board does, nothing is as significant as selecting the right superintendent of schools.

The functions and responsibilities of the superintendent are clearly stated in the statutes. His (or her) ability and knowledge of these stated laws should not be assumed. You might draw a superintendent from out of state where laws vary. However, learning the laws and what they mean is only a matter of time and therefore unfamiliarity should not deter you in making a choice.

The position of superintendent is one that is extremely sensitive. This person is the chief operating officer of the school district and the prime source of information to the board of education. Thus, you might draw up a list of attributes you desire in a leader of this sort. In addition you will want to create a job description. If you thumb through your policy manual you'll probably find an old job description. This is the appropriate time for revision and updating. One way to handle this problem is to state in broad terms what you want the superintendent to do, and then ask the various applicants to describe how they visualize the job of the superintendent.

A step-by-step procedure should be established for advertising, screening, interviewing, investigating, and making a final decision on this position. All check forms and information requests should be couched in objective language. Physical appearance should be way down on the list of attributes. What is important is that the superintendent "fit" your district and your board. The superintendent can and should set the operating tone for the schools just as the board creates the atmosphere for the entire district.

The board of education can save itself a good deal of grief if a screening committee composed of teachers, principals, students, PTA, and members of the community is involved in the selection. Conceivably this committee would then submit a list of three or five names for final consideration by the board. This would tend to push the decision making to a lower level yet the board would in no way abdicate its final authority to make the choice.

Don't be afraid to spend some money to send people to where the prospective superintendent served

in the past. In attention to objective data, ask board members for a subjective report on how they think the person's former community feels about the individual. There is no end to the questions to be raised. Seek answers from teachers, colleagues, bartenders, barber shop owners, children, parents, etc. Remember, the more information you have, the stronger will be the basis for your decision.

Perhaps some members of the board have had experience in hiring top personnel. If not, here are a few general rules. Take your time. Outside agencies and colleges can provide you with a temporary superintendent. Prepare for a good deal of homework. Brief applicants on the philosophy of your school district and ask how they would carry these ideas forward. And last, as any good personnel officer will tell you, "Where a person has been is a pretty fair indication of where he is going."

Selecting Other Administrators and Advisors

It should be fairly obvious that having expended a good deal of time and effort in the selection of a superintendent you have established a pattern for the selection of other members of the administrative team. The search for principals need not be as rigorous if you have picked the best person as superintendent. This holds true for other advisors such as curriculum coordinator, psychologist, board secretary, or business manager. You may have a little problem picking a lawyer. The intricacies of school law suggest that it would be advantageous to choose someone conversant with this phase of law. The same is true with regard to a business manager. In our state this is an emerging position and requires a good deal of experience in drawing up budgets and in defining the law, both state and federal, with regard to funding programs.

Many responsibilities fall on the shoulders of school board members, such as approval of books, curriculum, teacher tenure, guidance counsellors, and implementation of innovative programs. Unless your staff people

have undergone meticulous scrutiny you will find yourselves doing a good deal of investigative work. In the long run this is counter-productive. You should spend most of your time studying reports from people in whom you have confidence. This is the underlying principle of boardsmanship. Therefore, selecting the right team, the right mix of professionals, is the first step in making boardsmanship a more enjoyable experience.

The Role of the Staff

Each member of the staff has stipulated responsibilities. The way in which these responsibilities are related to those of the board indicates effective or ineffective boardsmanship. An example can be seen in the report of the child study team. The superintendent submits a monthly or bi-monthly report of the team's activities—how many cases are being handled, progress situations, new activities, etc.; then the board reacts to these reports. If these reports are not forthcoming with regularity then it behooves board members to request the information. An immediate response from the superintendent will indicate that he is trying to supply you with the necessary data. Repeated requests for information mean the superintendent has to be "jacked up."

The superintendent should be a prime transmitter of data and information. Reports of school incidents should be conveyed to the board even if no action is contemplated. Since it is the superintendent's responsibility to know what is going on in the schools, he ought to be able to keep the board well informed. Don't let this pipeline become clogged, as it too often does. Don't be dismayed if the superintendent says, "I don't know." Do be dismayed if he doesn't return with a full report. After all, he can't be everywhere all the time. When you raise a question he should investigate for you. He must be your eyes and ears. Once you lose confidence in him —look out.

Matters pertaining to the budget and school expenditures fall to the board secretary. The secretary is also charged with a number of other duties including the proper running of elections. It is interesting to note that

a board member usually approves bills for payment before they come to the full board for approval. This procedure leaves a lot to be desired. Delivery slips are presented to the board member and, based on receipted copies, the member approves the bills. That is, the member certifies that the material has been delivered. Who actually saw the material being delivered? Who counted the items? Is that person reliable? A recent situation where an oil delivery man was falsifying deliveries indicates why such questions should be raised. How did this happen? School districts are subject to all the flim-flam tactics of dishonest business people. Fortunately, this was a rare incident. However, this does not relieve the board of the heavy responsibility of being extra cautious with public funds.

The duties and obligations of the business manager or business administrator are clearly enunciated in the statutes. However, additional duties may be assigned to the business manager. High on the list of duties is the preparation and submission of the budget. Even though the superintendent has great input into the budget, there are a number of areas in which the business manager has more knowledge. The relationship which exists between the business manager and the board members should be cooperative but the superintendent, who is the board's own man, should have the final word. The board should never abdicate its authority.

The custodian of school moneys is the person who actually handles the cash receipts of the school district. Usually the custodian of the moneys of the municipality performs the same duties for the school district. However, in a regional or consolidated district, the board can appoint a suitable person, who may be a member of the board. A monthly report, proper accounting procedures, payroll, public notice or disposition of funds, and an annual report are all part of his responsibilities. Generally the board members have little interaction with this person. His reports speak for themselves.

The school board attorney has a plush job—until trouble arises. School law has become so complex that this, too, is an emerging specialty. Within the past ten

years the number and variety of school problems such as student treatment, tenure dismissal, violence, contracts, negotiations, and legal structure have required school attorneys with great skill. The school attorney may be called upon with relative infrequency for data or facts. When your attorney is needed it will usually be in an emergency situation and he should be ready and able to serve your needs.

Job Descriptions and Evaluations

Although the state has stipulated most of the duties of the members of the administrative team, each individual's activities may be as diverse as the board indicates. As suggested earlier, the job description should be broad in its terms and the individual should also be asked to define how he sees the position. If someone is assigned a responsibility for a job, he should be given the authority to carry out that job. This is where many job descriptions fall apart. Since the board is responsible for making decisions (particularly with respect to money which requires a roll call vote) it ultimately has complete control over everything happening in the school. For example, if the school psychologist is given the responsibility for testing, and the board does not approve the tests he feels are needed to carry out the job, then it cannot expect proper performance.

If the superintendent is instructed to prepare for individualized instruction and not given funds to study and detail the methods of implementation, he is powerless to perform his task. Be prepared, as part of boardsmanship, to give up some of your authority so that important responsibilities can be fulfilled. Responsibility and authority go hand in hand.

To judge whether or not your directives are being carried out you need a system of evaluation. The superintendent of a fairly small district introduced his board to 26 methods for evaluating programs. Among these were subjective essays, graphics, charts, critical incidents, check lists, field reviews, ranking, work standards, and management by objectives. Certainly a

major part of boardsmanship is to establish the techniques by which to evaluate what is going on in your school system. No system is perfect, but some system is needed. Each time you are asked to vote on an issue you should know what has happened. What were the goals? Did you meet them? How successful were they? If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.

There are even those who feel that boards themselves should be evaluated. Who should do the evaluating—teachers, administrators, children, PTA, citizens, county officials, state officials, federal officials—or the board itself? The main purpose of evaluation is to improve school operations. If you think everything you are doing is perfect, then evaluation can either confirm or deny your judgment. If you feel you are not doing as well as you should, evaluation can tell you where you need improvement.

The Management Team

Can you imagine a football team not following the directions of the quarterback? Or the quarterback not following the game plan of the coach? In education the analogy is similar. The board of education creates policy level plans for the conduct of the school. Administrators call the shots on the field. That's one of the reasons why lines of communication between them must be open and friendly.

As school districts grow in size it is evident that a single quarterback (the superintendent) may not be able to zero in on all the miscues of the individual players (teachers, etc.). So the field control is taken over by a "team." How this management team should operate has been the subject of considerable discussion from which has emerged a consensus on how the management team should function. The process is similar to the group dynamics which occur at the board level.

It is appropriate to consider the management team at this point because they are also the advisors to the board. One of the principles of the management team is that all personnel must engage in a system of open

communications. This means that each and every administrator is completely conversant with school problems and with how the team wants to deal with these problems.

Other benefits accrue because the entire team is involved in making the operating decisions which affect their daily lives. This in no way detracts from the authority of the superintendent or the board because the team gains direction from the board through the superintendent. Moreover, since the team sets plans and objectives and designs evaluative systems the board is always in complete control.

If your district opts for the management team concept you will find that all the suggestions advanced here for boardsmanship also apply to the administrative function. When a member of the team comes before the board he will be acting in concert with the other members of the team. And all energies will be directed toward solving educational problems, not personality problems.

The board of education usually has a number of talented administrators and staff people available for advice and counsel. These people are there to develop and present cogent position statements so that board members can make better decisions. If they can operate in a friendly, cooperative manner the quality of the information presented to the board will rise appreciably.

Chapter IV

The Board and Crisis

A story about Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister during World War I, relates his answer to the question, "How do you cope with the many pressures of government." His response, "For a change of pace I devote my energy to a different crisis."

School board members may from time to time feel they too can find relief only by dealing with different crises. The titles of some leading books on education contain the word "crisis". "Crisis in Black and White," and "Crisis in the Classroom," are examples. Other titles such as "Why Children Fail," and "Black Protest" imply crisis.

Board members will face crisis situations. However, the fact that board members may act only as a group at a public meeting affects how you deal with crisis. The seemingly unwieldy structure of boards can turn out to be an advantage because it deters rapid decision-making and forces board members to delay immediate action.

Perhaps a definition of crisis is needed here. According to the Random House Dictionary, "a crisis is a stage in a sequence of events at which the trend of all future events, especially for better or worse, is determined; a turning point." Examination of this definition should help every board member to gain perspective, to determine where the current crisis lies in the "sequence of events."

Many businesses and educational systems adopt a "management by crisis" methodology. They make decisions and take positions only when a crisis arises. Waiting for a groundswell of opinion to force you to act is not necessarily wrong. However, from a historical point of view better decisions are made when the policy-making agency, be it business or education, recognizes that crisis is building and prepares to cope with it before the last moment.

Key Elements of a Crisis

If we recognize crisis as a sequence of events, then the board must examine all the events and determine which are the symptoms and which are the causes. As William E. Woodward wrote about George Washington, "The turning point of lives are not the great moments. The real crises are often concealed in occurrences so trivial in appearance they pass unobserved."

Let's take a practical example. A board member received an urgent phone call telling him of an attack on a teacher by a high school student. Crisis! Is immediate action in order? Well, maybe it is and maybe it isn't. Before trading in your boardman's cloak for the black robe of a judge you'd better find out more about what took place and the events leading up to the final attack—if in fact there was an attack.

If your superintendent has been given authority, he may already have taken appropriate steps in regard to the matter. As we have seen, he can have that authority only if the board has backed him with adequate policy or given him the administrative muscle to make the decision. If he has no guidelines he may or may not act on his own. Is that what you want? You decide.

A crisis may call for an administrative decision, such as suspending a student from school. Presumably board policy will determine whether the superintendent has the power to act or whether the board has locked him into a position in which he is unable to act.

It is important that the board consider whether or not the situation is covered by school policy. If it is not —if the board has not considered the possibility of a student attacking a teacher—then policy action is required. There is no way that a board can anticipate all the possible crises. But, it stands to reason that the more crises it has considered beforehand, the fewer will be the types of confrontations which result in fearsome publicity and a rush to action.

High on the list of considerations by board members is whether they should enter the fray. In earlier portions of this book we have suggested that decisions ought to be pushed down the ladder to lower operating

levels. When the board moves into a situation it has the effect of bringing up the big guns. Decisions reached at the board level must be taken gingerly because of their far-reaching effect. This is not to say that board decisions cannot be challenged. They can be brought before the commissioner of education, the State Board of Education, or finally to the courts. The point is that the board is the highest decision-making body at the local level, and policies or administrative positions must be carefully studied to anticipate their possible effect.

All of which raises the question, at what point does the board make a decision? Do the board members wait until they have a "feel" for the situation and are ready to act? Timing is very important. Many storms vanish in the night or drift into minor disturbances. In the old west, an immediate response was known as "shooting from the hip."

As one legal expert has pointed out, "A crisis is like a play, and perhaps we should wait for the denouement, that moment of revelation which clarifies the situation. If our timing is right we will see the outcome of the plot."

Effective Crisis Management

A new board member, in trying to describe her position, said: "Boardsmanship is managing change."

As you mull over this definition perhaps you too will share this opinion. The function and structure of education is a series of never-ending changes and as a board member you are part of the process. Crisis, when it comes, is just another form of change.

If crisis foretells change, then the way to effectively manage that change is within an established framework. The first step is fact-finding. What do we know about the situation? Where can we get data to help guide us in making a decision?

The board has the authority to conduct hearings and investigations. The board even has the legal right to call witnesses to give testimony under oath. In addition, the board may decide to hire a private investigator or call upon the resources and knowledge of local col-

leges or other educational organizations. Certainly, if the situation is one that directly concerns students they should be called to offer opinions and testimony. The public should be equally involved. In brief, the board should avail itself of as much help and information as it can reasonably gather.

What are the limits of fact-finding? Realistically there are none. Time and the existing situation will help you determine how much effort to expend. During this entire period the individual board member should refrain from drawing a conclusion and further refrain from issuing statements to the press. Remember, as an individual you have no authority. Only when you join with your fellow board members can you act in an official capacity. As to the notion of secrecy, this represents another part of the framework for dealing with crisis.

If there is ever a time when good public relations are needed, it is during a crisis. Suffice it to say that secrecy is abhorrent in our society, particularly when dealing with so all-encompassing a subject as education and the local schools. There are undoubtedly times when the board will consider personnel files and subjects which are best kept under wraps, but except in cases involving these matters your actions as a board member should be completely open.

Let's digress for a moment. Of course, as a board member you will counsel with your colleagues on many subjects in private before reaching decisions and conclusions. As you leave these gatherings certain members may say: "Let's keep this among ourselves. No need to get the public involved at this point." Although, this may seem a logical stance to take, don't succumb to such a temptation. It is a short-sighted position because ultimately you will have to confront the public. You live in the glaring light of public opinion.

For these reasons you should consider holding public hearings. If this is not possible, then the public should be kept completely informed of the testimony and the depth of the board investigation. The more you try to conceal what is going on, the more the public will become incensed and demand to know. Legally they are on firm ground.

At the same time it is important to reaffirm your faith in the faculty and administration. Special efforts should be made to keep the management team abreast of data so that they may transmit this information throughout the entire system. Even the students, particularly in high schools, should be told of the progress of the investigation. If this idea seems untoward, consider the results if, after two months study and investigation, you suddenly make an announcement. You will find yourself in the position of having to answer the public anyway; why not involve them all along the way?

The third facet of effective crisis management is making a decision. Having gathered a significant amount of data, and created an open atmosphere of investigation, the board has reached the point of taking a position. This, too, should be circulated to the public. There are a number of formulas for decision making. Check lists, subjective analysis, priority rating of data, long range analysis, etc., might all be employed. The important thing is for all the board members to agree on what method or methods to use. That way you will be able to assign emphasis where you agreed it is needed. Making decisions during or after a crisis can be a very trying procedure. Nonetheless, they have to be made.

To insure that you have made a good decision, there must be a follow-up. Build into your decisions methods whereby the results can be monitored and evaluated. The very fact that you intend to measure the benefits or results of your decisions will force you to make better decisions.

Crisis as Part of Boardsmanship

Like marbles, crises come in different sizes and with varying degress of clarity. Some you can roll around in your fingers four or five at a time. Others must be held up to the light with both hands to be truly appreciated.

Experience suggests that all crises must first be placed in the total perspective of what your school system is seeking to accomplish. The first step is to move back from the exploding situation and view it from

afar. Then gather the facts, as many as possible. As a board of education you should deal with the larger aspect of crises, the policy types of decisions. Avoid making administrative decisions, but back and support your administrator. If he errs, chalk it up to the fact that nobody is perfect. If he defies you, treat that accordingly. Look upon a crisis as an opportunity to make decisions which can bring about needed change in your schools. Every challenge is an opportunity.

Decide when to decide. Avoid making spot decisions before all the facts are in. Again, during the entire process keep your public informed to the fullest extent possible. When you have made your decision, initiate methods to verify if the decision was a good one. Don't think you won't make mistakes; we all do. But create the machinery to check your own actions. This will build a tremendous feeling of confidence within your community.

Also, since crises are like marbles they can roll towards you or away from you. If you see them in other communities you might suspect they are on the way to your school district. Thus, you might be able to spot a crisis forming and turn it into an opportunity for positive action by the school board and the administration. You might try asking your superintendent what clouds he sees on the horizon.

After you have played the game of boardsmanship for a while you will take crisis in your stride—if you have established a framework into which all problems can be slipped. A labyrinth is a labyrinth only if you don't have a map.

Chapter V

Students and the Educational Environment

The authority of a school board member can be exhibited either positively or negatively. Nowhere is this more evident than with regard to curriculum. This may be the single most important area of boardsmanship, yet quite possibly the most neglected. The law is very clear: "No course of study may be adopted or altered except by a recorded roll call majority vote of the full school board. Textbooks are selected by a recorded roll call majority vote of the full membership of the board and are loaned to pupils free of charge." Who says boards of education don't have power?

One board member categorizes the curriculum as the content of education, and buildings as the context. It is the responsibility of the board of education to deal with, agree to, alter, diminish, and change, when it sees fit, the content of the education it offers to children. Despite the fact there are many limitations imposed by state law, there are innumerable ways by which boards can vary curriculum.

Many new board members are bent out of shape before they realize that determination of the course of study is their perogative. True, the state mandates a certain amount of American history, physical and health education programs, observance of many holidays, and the study of civics. But, the balance of the curriculum is in the hands of the board.

Every school year the board must vote on the curriculum and the books which go with it. Because we have confidence and trust in our professional educators, this entire gesture tends to become an oversized rubber stamp. When that happens it is because we fail to grasp the significance of our jobs as board members. Before you approve anything, you had better be in a position to know and understand what is happening.

Perhaps an examination of certain extremes will permit you to focus on the problem. Every once in a while a school board member will start to scream about, "readin', ritin', and 'rithmetic," as if he had suddenly discovered that a return to the basics of education is the answer to the worlds' problems. Usually he will even want to go back to McGuffy's Reader and throw out all the "new fangled audio-visual junk."

At the other end of the spectrum are those people who think that electronic devices and new style classrooms will insure proper education. Hopefully, good boardsmanship will allow for both of these, and still find a happy middle ground. For your own peace of mind and skillful boardsmanship, you should adhere to two rules. First, examine the programs proposed by your school administration. Second, gather as much information as you feel you need to make a competent decision.

In a recent "book burning" situation in the midwest, board members ordered certain books destroyed after having originally passed on their use. The greatest tragedy was that the removal of the books was ordered although the board still had not read the books. That's right, you must pass on the use of all books and if you don't know what's in them—look out.

The task of reviewing books is not nearly as horrendous as it sounds. If your board has a book committee, the number of proposed new texts will be relatively small. After all, your schools have been using certain books for a long time. It is a fair assumption that these books have been in the system for a while and require only a casual review from time to time. It is when a curriculum change is proposed, or a new series of text books suggested that you, as a board member, assume responsibility. If the management team seems loathe to give you a full report on the book contents, then your vote is wasted.

Take the case of a request for new books for the fifth grade. The principal asked for ninety books at a total cost of $500. Sounds reasonable. Realistically, the request should have specified the name, publisher,

purpose, unit price, and been accompanied by a copy of the book for the perusal of the board. You, the board member, are responsible for the approval of texts and any changes in curriculum. If you don't examine the books and the curriculum, don't complain later when the public calls you to task for not fulfilling your job.

Program Controversy and Assessment

Up jumped a parent at a board meeting one night and yelled, "The foreign language program is a disaster. How could you permit this to happen?"

"What do you mean?" asked the school board president. "I thought we were doing a great job."

What followed was a mini-version of the type of controversy school boards all over the state must deal with. Programs are started, the curriculum is changed, and out there the public is either completely lacking in comprehension or else possesses some information which the school board does not have at its disposal. In this instance, the irate parent had a child in the foreign language class and the youngster had reported that chaos reigned—that little learning was taking place.

Before reacting, the school board ought to add a measure of leavening; there is no need to accept an accusation just because it is offered. But, where new programs have been instituted, there ought to be a way to judge the degree of success. Over and over board members will hear the same refrain: "How do we assess what is going on?" The parent mentioned is entitled to some sort of explanation and the explanation should be based on factual data, not impressions from a classroom.

One of the most significant curriculum changes of recent years has been individualized instruction. Although subject matter remains essentially the same, there is change in the way it is presented, the way students learn, and the total concept of the classroom. Before a school system can adopt individualized instruction, the board has to give its approval. If you, as a board member, are convinced that this technique will yield better educational results, your management team should be prepared to establish the methods and sys-

tems for determining the desired results. It's called assessment.

When a parent questions individualized instruction, the board can then respond by reciting the goals of the program, the stage it is in, and how successful the school has been in implementing the program. The whole idea of evaluation or assessment is so simple it is hard to understand why boards do not insist that their professional staff establish such procedures early in the game.

Determining what your children should learn and the best way to have them acquire knowledge is a serious responsibility. The framework for this effort consists of ingestion of data and facts, agreement to be open to change, and a method to evaluate the effort. The board of education sets the curriculum. Do not relinquish your control.

Student Attendance

Children romping in the school yard, or their older siblings sprawled across the campus of the high school, are very visible in our schools. However, there are other students who fall under the purview of the board of education—those who are handicapped because of either illness or some form of physical or mental disability. The law clearly states that all children are entitled to an education; in fact that from between the ages of six to sixteen they must attend school. Special provision for free public education may be provided beginning at age five and through age 20.

Until a board member begins to consider special cases, the law seems to be evenly applicable to all children. It soon becomes more even in its interpretation when you are called upon to pay for home instruction because a youngster cannot leave his bed. Or, you may have to send a youngster to a school outside your district to get an education which is not available to him in the immediate vicinity. The board of education must provide an education to ALL children.

In addition, you are mandated to supply transportation. If the high school is more than two and a half

miles from the home of the student, the school district must either provide buses, or pay for transportation by public accommodation. If the elementary school is two miles away from the home of the students, the school board must provide some form of transportation.

This problem is multiplied now that the law has been interpreted to include transportation to non-public schools as well. In other words, even though some students attend a parochial or private school, your board is responsible for transportation. If there are no established transportation lines you have the option of reimbursing the family up to $150 a year in costs. Obviously, boards elect the method which is least expensive.

The transportation formula is complex because a school district which has the problem of transporting a student to a special education center may find it convenient to join with another district in an attempt to reduce the cost. These "jointures" join districts in a loose partnership with other school districts all over the county, and sometimes out of the county. The state reimburses the individual school districts for up to 75 percent of the cost of transportation.

Some districts buy and operate their own buses, while others rent buses on a contract basis. Buses hold about 50 children and it is not uncommon for a district with 2,000 students to bus half that number. That means twenty buses, insurance, drivers, garages, and all the attendant problems.

It is easy to visualize the problems inherent in trying to establish some kind of racial balance in school districts where de facto segregation exists. The basic cost of busing is enough to drive any school board wild. The best intentioned board members balk when they have to come up with sizeable sums to cover the transportation costs involved in integrating schools.

Student Discipline

Now that you have a course of study, and you get the kids to school on time, you are responsible for ensuring that they behave in a "proper" fashion. What's "proper?" Well, as times change, behavior modes

change also. Remember, you used to do homework in the calm and silence of your bedroom. Today's youngsters seem to study better with the stereo blaring loudly.

There are so many new rulings about what is acceptable behavior and students rights, that anything said in this book is open to interpretation. Like the time an eighth grader came to school without socks. The principal of the school took exception and after quite a spat, sent the kid home—suspended. Next day the young man was back in school—still without socks.

However, school boards can and do make rules. Recent months have found boards consulting with and listening to students. Dress codes and acceptable behaviors are worked out. This does not mean the school board is without power. On the contrary, your management team has the authority to suspend a youngster for a short period of time, but only the school board may expel a student. However, this is an appealable action so, when in doubt, consult your school attorney.

Health and Safety

There are many things the board must do to protect the children under their care. Fire drills, for instance, must be conducted twice a month. Accurate reports on how rapidly the schools are evacuated are required by law. Health examinations are also prescribed by law.

You will find such things taking place almost by rote—that is, they are carried out with little thought because the professional staff knows what must be done. However, checking the fire extinguishers, examining a school building for safety precautions, and arranging for medical examinations are all part of boardsmanship. As a safety measure, many high schools have allocated special smoking areas for students. This raises both a health issue (smoking) and a safety issue (avoiding the possibility of fire).

The Special Student

Education is an exciting enterprise, as we have

indicated earlier. One of the newer fields of investigation has been the special child, the one with a slight physical handicap. It is easy to recognize a learning disability when a child has a severe physical handicap. What about the child who has a slight impairment in sight or hearing? What do you do about that child?

Here's a fairly common complaint. Little Susie is in the fifth grade but reads at the second grade level. Is the teacher at fault? Is the system at fault? Lately we have discovered that little Susie has an almost imperceptible eye disorder. Because she is unable to see properly, she is unable to learn to read properly. What do you do about it?

Fortunately, New Jersey is in the forefront in dealing with such problems. Legislation requiring child study teams and psychologists in school systems has been well lived up to by local school boards. Child study teams seek to identify those youngsters with special physical problems and to prescribe programs that enable them to learn at a somewhat different pace. Special classes have been established for the neurologically impaired, perceptually impaired, emotionally disturbed, etc. Districts which cannot provide their own special class, transport students to other nearby districts. Special education—education for the handicapped child —is one of the major problems confronting education today.

In middle-class communities probably ten percent of the youngsters will be found to have learning disabilities. But—hold on to your hat— in "disadvantaged" communities this figure may go as high as thirty percent. In other words, a fairly large number of youngsters cannot succeed in the usual educational atmosphere. They need some kind of special educational prescription and a different mode of learning.

As a school board member you are responsible for ALL the children. Meeting the needs of all is part of boardsmanship. You are responsible for their education, transportation, behavior, safety, and health as well as for additional needs requiring even more funds and more attention. And don't forget those children with high intellects; you have to care for the gifted child also.

Student Activism

The last decade has seen a rise in the activity of high school students in shaping their own careers and roles in society. The authoritarian parent and school board member views this increased activity with alarm. The more participative type of personality sees it as a great learning process both for the young and for the board.

Who is to say whether boards of education should rule with an iron hand, or with receptiveness to change? That is up to you and your colleagues. Perhaps we can learn from history. We proudly proclaim that our schools teach the idea of democracy. Can you teach democracy in the morning and practice dictatorship in the evening? If we are trying to impart the idea of freedom to the students, then shouldn't we demonstrate freedom in our dealings with young people? Do we know what's best for them simply because we are older? Don't forget, the law now says that an 18-year-old may be elected to a school board.

Student activism does not always manifest itself in a crisis situation. It may emerge in the form of demands and requests for more say on how schools are run. How far your board goes with these requests is a matter of local option.

One way to think about your role as a board member is to visualize yourself as a parent responsible for an oversize family. All the problems of directing that family exist—health, safety, learning, and life itself. That's why it is important for board members to relate to one another—so they may cope with all the problems of the family called a "school."

Chapter VI

Schools Run on Money

Money fuels the forward thrust of education. Progress and innovation can take place without money, but the major purposes of education are served with money. And it is through its use of available money that boards exercise control over their school districts.

Funds for school operations come from four main sources. The first is from state allocations. About sixteen percent of total school budgets come from the state. The formula is complex and there is little you can do about your specific allotment. Data supplied by your district determines the amount of revenue you will receive.

Federal funding comes in the form of "titles." This is part of school board jargon, and refers to educational programs supported by those large federal appropriations you read about in the newspapers. The Office of Education (OE) offers aid to local school districts which initiate special programs. These may take the form of reading projects, summer programming, community involvement, and all manner of educational innovation. So intricate and elaborate are these funding programs that even small school districts appoint someone on the management team to oversee and write programs. However, New Jersey schools receive less than five percent of their total operating funds from this source.

School districts which operate high schools and serve as "receiving schools" for smaller districts are paid tuition for those children. Regional high schools serving as receiving schools for a group of smaller districts are supported by tuition charges assessed against each of those districts. Also, your district might have a perceptually impaired class, or a neurologically impaired class which accepts students from other districts. Districts are entitled to a tuition fee for those children. These charges must be approved by the county superintendent

and districts are not allowed to make a profit on the operation.

The main source of school funding is the "local contribution," which accounts for close to eighty percent of operating funds. This is the amount of money your constituents, the taxpayers, produce to run the schools. After all the income has been examined, and necessary outgo has been determined, the remaining fiscal needs are expressed in the form of the local property tax.

The whole notion of property taxes is currently under scrutiny by the courts and decisions and counter-decisions are flowing forth. There is little question that the situation is fluid. Therefore, we suggest only that you keep your eyes and ears open to the changes forming on the horizon.

Where Does The Money Go?

The New Jersey School Boards Association has accumulated much information on how school moneys are spent. The following figures are intended only as an overview—a rough guide to where the money goes. Each school board must decide on how to spend the moneys available to its district. The data is for informational purposes only.

Administration	2.9%
Instruction	55.0%
Attendance and Health	1.5%
Transportation	2.8%
Operations	6.7%
Maintenance	2.6%
Fixed charges	3.8%
Capital outlay	1.2%
Debt service	5.6%
Improvement authorization	9.0%

The Budget—PPBS—Cost Effectiveness

A budget is a statement of educational goals expressed in terms of dollars. Now that you and your colleagues have decided on the goals and objectives of

your school system, you have to provide the wherewithal to carry out the programs. Although the state has furnished a pattern for how the budget should be stated, this need not limit your investigation. Basically, the budget will be prepared on a "line" basis. This means simply that every item appears as a different line in the total budget and the amount of money allocated for that line is stated. Obviously, by controlling the line-items you effectively control school activity.

Budgeting and accounting experts have suggested two additional methods whereby business and education can examine their budgets. The most popular is the Planned Program Budgeting System (PPBS). Briefly, the entire cost of a specific program—instructional, resource, secretarial, material, etc.—is budgeted. The purpose is to enable board members to understand the actual, entire cost of a program, and to realize that instituting a change in the curriculum involves much more than merely allocating money for a teacher.

As an example—a superintendent recommended that French be introduced in grades seven and eight. "The only cost," he said, "will be the expense of hiring one new teacher for about $9,000."

This seems reasonable, but actually it is completely fallacious. The board was astute enough to realize that there would be expense for books, paper, supervision, the allocation of a room, rescheduling, etc. In other words, this simple program required a fairly substantial commitment of resources. Using PPBS the superintendent could have given the board a realistic picture of what the total program would cost.

A note of caution: PPBS is not a management system, it is a management tool. It presents data and facts in a fresh fashion and a new viewpoint. PPBS solves no problems. It simply adds to the boardman's perspective.

Another accounting technique is termed "cost effectiveness." This is an extension of the PPBS idea which throws in a measure of "accountability." Assuming your school opts for a particular program and devotes resources to that program, what are you going to get for your money? Suppose, for example, using a cost

effective type of budgeting, you are able to determine that your English classes in the high school cost $80 per pupil, shop classes cost $103 per pupil, and the new class in career education costs $137 per pupil. Now you are in a better position to determine how to allocate your resources.

You might even carry this analysis a step further and add in the results of the instructional program—how much an average student achieved during the school year. Some board members feel this kind of examination is too difficult and that the whole thing ought to be "left in the hands of the professionals." You have to decide how deeply you want to get involved in your school budget.

The Budget Meeting

Even though a school board may take action only in public, a number of budget workshop meetings will generally precede the open meeting presentation of the budget. There are several ways to approach this moment. The board should, very early in the game, give some direction to the superintendent. This could take the form of a philosophic discussion of the nature of budgeting, and what your district is trying to accomplish. Lest you think this is a futile effort, consider whether you are going to run the budget or the budget is going to run you.

The easy way, and a real cop-out, is for the superintendent to review last year's budget, add the increased costs, and say: "Here it is, ladies and gentlemen." Many budgets are presented just this way. As opposed to this, the board may roll out its objectives and goals and create a budget designed to meet these objectives and goals. Every item in the budget, or as many items as possible, should be designed to meet your goals and objectives. (If you don't have goals and objectives go back to the beginnings of boardsmanship and decide what it is you are trying to do.)

Every board has at least one member who opens a budget meeting by saying: "We have to hold the budget down. No need to force the tax rate up." If that's your

philosophy, okay. However, if you review the literature pertinent to boardsmanship you will have a tough time finding this kind of statement. This may sound like heresy, but the tax rate is not your prime consideration. Good education, for all the kids in your district, is. First, design the educational program which you and your citizens desire. You will be amazed at the public support for dynamic educational concepts.

A rapid review of the budget will tell you where the costs of education have grown out of proportion. This is where you must study the proposals made by your professional staff. Every line item should be substantiated with documentation and facts. You need specific information as to the cost of every new table, every film strip, every repair job, every new series of textbooks. You should account for every nickel and dime you plan to spend.

Here's a practical example. A superintendent presented his board with a budget item for $5,600 for "remedial reading programs."

"How's the money going to be spent?" asked a board member.

"We're going to set up a special section of the high school library and have the better students tutor those who have fallen behind."

"Good idea. But, where are you going to spend the money?"

"Well, we're going to get some additional materials, and possibly a few teaching carrels. We plan to use a lot of workbooks."

"Have you detailed the costs of these items and how many youngsters you will be helping?"

"No, we haven't worked that out yet. This will be a new program and we want to go slowly."

It's hard for a board member to be against this kind of thinking. Still, you can't agree to a lot of gobbledygook. If the program is a serious effort, the superintendent should be able to tell you how many students will be involved, how many pieces of equipment are needed, how much everything will cost and even how he will report back to you during the year on the progress

of the program. If you settle for less you're not doing your job.

You will undoubtedly find there are more things you would like to see accomplished than the budget can accommodate. Don't be frustrated. There are a variety of ways to order your priorities. Start by making a list of worthwhile projects. Then incorporate them into the budget as money allows. You do have to consider money, but only after you have decided what your educational goals are, and how they can be met.

Public Budget Meetings

Under the law, Type II elected boards must prepare the budget for public vote by February 1. You do have recourse if the public votes against your budget, but the steps are lengthy and arduous. It's better to gain public support before election time. Your power, strength, and ability to persuade the public will be tested in the weeks before the vote. If you have been open and honest, you have used the best possible approach to the public. The big problem with a voted budget is that if you run out of money at the end of the school year you have very little recourse to additional funds.

Type I districts submit their budgets no later than February 15 to a board of school estimate which is composed of three members of the governing body of the municipality and two members of the board of education. However, if the district runs out of money before the end of the year it may request additional funds from the board of school estimate. In practice this means that Type I districts can budget on the low side because they can always ask for more money, while Type II districts have to budget more accurately, and make provision for unforeseen eventualities.

In either case, if your school district winds up the year with a surplus you may keep a small amount of that money against a rainy day. However what usually happens is that the money is thrown back into the pot and used to reduce the local contribution the following budget year.

Public Relations and Money

School budgets are defeated because board members think they know better than the public how to run the schools. They do, but under our system of running the schools the voting public has the privilege of adding its input to a school budget. Competent boardsmanship suggests that you inform the public to the best of your ability of the many problems, of how you plan to attack them, and of how much money you need to carry out the educational endeavors of your school district. Try to carry your programs forward without a broad base of public support, and you're in trouble.

During a discussion on how to present the budget to the public, one board president asked: "Just how much of the budget do we have to show the public? Is there any sense in telling them all the little details?" That's bad thinking and bad boardsmanship. Your strength derives from your ability to project your thinking and concerns to an interested public.

If you, as a board member, have considered all the expenses, examined all the ways to implement your philosophy and achieve your objectives, and burned the midnight oil to arrive at the tightest possible budget, then you will not be afraid to meet the public in open and discuss these deliberations. Only when board members become secretive and try to evade answers to real questions does the public become wary and anxious to cut a budget.

The best way to deal with a public already overtaxed, is to openly and honestly present all the facets of the budget. This means of course, that you truly understand the financial commitments you have made. The board member who can't deal with questions from the public is remembered by concerned parents and taxpayers. If you are providing the type of education which reflects the thinking of your community, and if you can explain how this is reflected in the budget, your community will back you on election day.

School Business Affairs

Many people take pride when making a purchase in "shopping around" for the best value. When dealing with public funds you have to do better than that. Any expenditure of more than $2,500 has to be submitted for open bidding in a formalized fashion. Specifications must be drawn and advertised so that any "responsible" bidder may seek to get the contract. Sealed bids are opened at a board meeting and action may be taken or deferred to the superintendent or the business manager. However, at a subsequent open board meeting the awarding of the contract must be officially voted. If your board decides to give a contract to other than the lowest bidder, it had better be in a position to defend its choice.

Sometimes boards evade the law. For instance, a high school was refurbishing the chemistry lab at a cost they estimated at about $15,000. The specifications were lengthy and complex and the superintendent asked one of the largest companies in the business to help him write them. When the bids finally came in, that company was awarded the contract, because no one else could meet the specifications. On the surface the law had been met, bids had been advertised and awarded in the proper fashion. However, the school suffered because the bidders were restricted to those who could bid on the particular brands specified in the description of the materials needed.

Another way used to circumvent bidding requirements is to break jobs down into smaller units which can be awarded without the benefit of bidding. The board then maintains, "there is only one (select the correct word, painter, electrician, contractor, book company, printer, etc.) who can do the job. We'll have to give him the bid." Let your conscience be your guide and be prepared to deal with irate citizens who are not equally convinced that only one person is capable of fulfilling a need of your school system.

Many school districts have organized joint buying efforts to obtain lower prices on products or services which are commonly bought, such as oil, paper supplies,

transportation contracts, books, repair services, food service, food, etc. You may find it worthwhile to sacrifice a little of your authority to achieve a monetary saving for your district.

Insurance

Insurance is necessary protection. How much your district needs and what kind is a very difficult problem. There are a number of areas which require coverage, ranging from employee health and retirement, to fire, storm, lightning, vandalism, and even protection for board members against civil suits.

The best way to make sure you have proper coverage to cover all exigencies is to have an active insurance committee exploring all possibilities. Insurance protection can be put out for bid the same way you bid for tables and chairs.

The N.J. School Boards Association has a comprehensive set of sample specifications covering almost all areas of insurance protection—including board member liability—which is available to all boards for the asking.

Budget time is boardsmanship time. It is that period when you must call on all your patience, understanding, and acumen to put together the total money package for the ensuing year. The responsibility for assembling a budget for two, five, or ten million dollars is a heavy charge. It is the appropriate moment to draw on all your boardsmanship capabilities to bring to your public a viable and an acceptable request for funds. Your first duty is to provide educational excellence as enunciated by your goals and objectives. Then you must search for ways to match your goals with your resources. It's a jigsaw puzzle, but don't despair—by the time you have completed one budget, you have the opportunity to begin work on the next one.

Chapter VII

Schools as a Physical Environment

A recurring and nagging question posed by many school board members runs something like this. "What kind of environment produces the best atmosphere for learning?"

This question has to do with the physical surroundings in which the children spend a good portion of their day. "Do people learn better when the walls are painted pale blue or pale green?" "What kind of landscaping will please the eye and therefore make the first impact in the morning more pleasant?" "What size gym will at once accommodate the students and still give them a feeling of substance?" Then, of course, there is today's favorite question. "Do we need walls separating classrooms?"

In the strictest sense, buildings do not contribute to education. However, in a pragmatic sense we know that pleasing surroundings do make the learning process move forward with greater ease. There have been sufficient and significant studies to indicate this. Remember the board member who thought of the buildings as the "context" of education.

The run-down, beat-up, three-story, red brick school building in the heart of a residential area is not now considered conducive to educational excellence. Yet, many of us can think back to happy times in just such a school. If this is the type of structure you have inherited, you might consider ways to spruce up the appearance and make it more appetizing to students. Adequate maintenance is a must.

With regard to maintenance, styles and thinking change. A good example is the use of carpeting in a classroom. As a board member, you will have the opportunity to determine if the installation of carpeting will effectively reduce the costs of painting and repair. Even

door locks, a rather prosaic subject, will require a good deal of attention. As an aside, discovering who has keys to the building can also be an interesting question. In one system virtually every member of the faculty, administrative team, and maintenance department had easy access to school buildings. Duplicate keys were floating all over the place.

To insure a degree of safety you will have to entrust your building committee with the task of closely examining the buildings. Broken concrete steps, torn up school yards, overgrown bushes, dangerous hanging wires, and improper lighting are but a few of the hazzards you must be aware of. In one school district a building had been expanded three times in ten years. The original structure had a lighting system which threw off twenty lumines of light in the classrooms. The second section had thirty lumines, and the last section had fifty lumines of light. As each new section was developed, the laws regarding the amount of light had changed. The problem was, do you change the lighting in the older portions of the building? The expense of this type of renovation had to be weighed against the changing codes established by a higher authority.

The best way to cope with the many maintenance problems is to schedule regular repairs on a long-term basis. For instance, every building should be painted periodically. Stagger the years so that the budget will accommodate to the necessary job. A systematic program of replacement of windows to a more durable product and of worn-out toilet facilities and equipment will be easier to accomplish than a rush to fixed crippled facilities.

Some school districts, using a very businesslike approach, even list their buildings as assets, and depreciate them in the same way that industry depreciates property. When it comes time to talk about new buildings you will find you have a more viable argument to present to your constituents.

Assessing Future Needs

One clearly stated permissive power of boards of education is to "cause an exact census to be made annually of all the school age children in the district and to employ appropriate personnel for this purpose." Generally this type of community survey is carried out by the superintendent. In practice this gives the board some fair idea of the size of the incoming enrollment in kindergarten. However, this is not nearly sufficient if the board is to consider long range building needs.

How do you determine what your school population will be in five years? or ten years? You have available a number of resources to help you reach a sensible conclusion. Here are some information sources: The census bureau, chamber of commerce, city hall, local planning board, real estate offices, projected new building complexes, census of housing, census of business, and most important of all, your librarian. Yes, your librarian can offer some interesting sources of information which will help you ascertain just how your school district will grow.

In short, one of your prime jobs will be to look ahead and plan for the possible burgeoning growth of your community. On the other hand, you might discover that your community is not going to grow at a fast rate, and may even decline in population. This information and data are musts if you are to plan the best use of your present facilities. You can minimize the guesswork by accumulating facts.

New buildings are not the only means of accommodating a growing population. A space utilization study will probably reveal unused areas in your present facilities. Bear in mind that there is no magic about school starting at 9 a.m. and ending at 3 p.m. One high school has eliminated study halls and staggered the arrival time of different grades of students. For instance, seniors and juniors start class at 9 a.m. and leave school around 2 p.m. Sophomores and freshman arrive at 10 a.m. and leave about 3 p.m. The curriculum does not have to include study halls. In this particular instance the stu-

dents were spending ten periods each week out of a possible thirty-five periods, in study halls. The saving in time and space was considerable.

Then there is the idea of year-round schools. Think about the potential saving in buildings. The state decrees that students attend 180 days of school a year. What happens to your buildings the rest of the time? Why not operate your schools on a four-quarter plan, with students required to attend any three quarters each year? The saving in facilities would clearly be about one-third. Think of it—you could accommodate one-third more students without having to invest in any more buildings! Careful, you might have to air-condition the schools. It's just one idea, but one worthy of your earnest consideration.

Once you know what the growth patterns are going to be, you have several options ranging from new buildings to better use of your present facilities. A regional high school even split itself into two, with the mornings devoted to one set of students and the afternoons to a second set of students. They got twice the use of their facilities and did no appreciable harm to the students. In fact, they even adopted different names for the morning and afternoon schools. One building—two names.

Construction

There has been a tremendous rush to construct new buildings in the past twenty years. Part of this was brought about because of the rising birth rates in the 1950's. Well, birth rates have tapered off, shifting population patterns now seem to be reversing themselves. Who knows what tomorrow has in store? Even if you do project school population figures for five years, what then? It takes almost five years to anticipate, plan, finance, and construct new buildings. Many school districts have found themselves in the position of opening a new building which was already too small to fill their needs. This suggests an on-going study of growth to determine what will happen in ten years. Obviously this is hazardous. Therefore, once you have a five-year

plan, revise it each year. That way you will have a fair idea of the immediate future, and you will always be five years ahead of the game.

Boards of education have broad authority to buy, sell, lease, and build properties to fulfill their mission. When construction seems indicated the money is usually forthcoming in the form of bond issues. Having presented the case for a new school to the public, or to the board of school estimate in the case of a Type I district, the board engages an architect and describes the type of facility needed. The rather lengthy procedure includes gaining the inputs of everybody involved from the teachers to the public to the students to the administrative team. That's right, everybody is going to want to have his say and, although the decision rests ultimately with the board of education, it is wise boardsmanship to allow for all these expressions of opinion.

Plans have to be examined, reexamined, and then examined again. Finally, they must be approved by the State Board of Education. Regardless of the ability of your architect, the state will undoubtedly recommend changes. The restrictions on buildings are never-ending because new methods and new concepts are constantly coming to the fore and these requirements have to be accommodated in your new structure. All of these revisions must be incorporated into the plans.

The entire process may stretch out over a couple of years. It takes that long to conceive, discuss, commit to plans, discuss, revise, discuss, submit to the state, discuss, resubmit to the state for final approval and then offer to the public for approval. Then there is more discussion. The basic problem is that from start to finish the building may grow in size, and the upward thrust of building costs will spiral your expenses. Be prepared.

There are also other things to consider. The money for the new building in the form of capital funds may be assigned to your board even though the plans have not been finally approved. You may not spend this money except for capital improvements or building. However, since you have the cash in hand the sensible thing to do is to invest in certificates of deposit or short-term trea-

sury notes. These short-range methods of gaining interest on your funds are acceptable and are better vehicles for making maximum use of your money than a savings account. Once again your authority as a board member is brought into play. Bids from banks should be accepted and the decision as to which bank should have the use of your capital must be approved by a majority roll call vote of the full board. The possibility that you will control these funds for a year or more is great. Interest earned can be used for other capital needs of the new building, including equipment and materials.

Articulating a New Building

As the need and the decision for a new building go forward you must "articulate" these needs. This is a word used in educational jargon. It means you must express through a number of channels why and how you plan to provide the new facility. To say that you must surround the project with a fair amount of public relations and publicity is too easy. Every step of the way must be paved with public involvement. Over the past decade many school bond issues have been defeated at the polls. Too many, in fact. Probably the major reason for these defeats has been poor boardsmanship, or lack of boardsmanship.

The position of school board member carries a strong aura of dignity. However, the authority invested in you is limited by the wants and desires of your constituents. Your activity on the board is similar to life in a fish bowl. People are very concerned about their children and the education you are supplying for them. They also have personal concerns, including the size of the yearly tax bill. When new schools are suggested they get more involved than at any other time. Senior citizens who no longer have youngsters in school exhibit a tremendous concern with the effect a new building will have on the tax rate. Boardsmanship suggests that each and every member of the community must be aware of what is going on.

Articulation of a new building is more than simply employing good public relations. It is a technique for

conveying the total problem to the community at large and insuring the successful bond issue. Planning for adequate articulation is almost as complex as planning for the building itself, and usually starts about a year before the notion of a new building is actually presented to the public. You have the facts representing the need long before anybody else. To reveal and relate these facts to your community is one of the most interesting, challenging, and time-consuming tasks of boardsmanship.

There are few things as exciting for a member of a board of education as a stroll around a new building and a close examination of a plaque which bears his name. To be part of a group which instigated, planned, and succeeded in the construction of a new school is a reward reserved for few people. However, that thrill has to be matched against the realistic need for new facilities.

It is important to take note of the community school concept. This idea, essentially, implies full use of school buildings by making them available for community needs. Originated in Flint, Mich., community schools do a number of things for the community in an attempt to utilize the physical buildings. One set of figures shows that the average public school is used 1900 hours a year. By incorporating community-based programs, a community school might be used as much as 3800 hours a year. With no additional financial commitment, your system can get twice as much use out of present facilities. It behooves every board to send a representative to investigate the Flint Schools and bring back some of their concepts for the board to examine.

Whatever your decision in terms of new buildings, this is surely one of the most fascinating endeavors of the board. New buildings do make for happier children; they do build pride in the school community.

A warning—don't be deluded into thinking that a spanking new building will reduce vandalism. The windows of a new building break just as easily, unless you install break-proof glass.

Chapter VIII

The Board as an Employer

How does it feel to be the "boss" of a large staff of people—administrators, teachers, cooks, maintenance staff, classroom aides, and specialists? Few board members are accustomed to the presumed authority of directing the efforts of such a conglomeration of professional and service people. The authority has limitations. If you walk through a school, see something that displeases you, and think that you can tell a teacher or a maintenance person to do something, you're wrong on at least two counts. First, you don't have any authority unless you are sitting with your colleagues at an open board meeting. Second, you have defied a tenet of boardsmanship by subverting the authority of your superintendent.

There are pitfalls, too. You might draw the attention of the superintendent to a particular situation which you feel is wrong. Strictly speaking he does not have to react to your suggestion. In reality he will try to satisfy you because you are a member of his board. That's why any recommendations or requests you make must be done gingerly. A casual remark, "I hear Mary Jones has applied for a job," may be misconstrued to mean that you are really interested in her finding employment in your system.

The mantle of authority, which is definitely yours, must be worn as though it does not exist. Even though you don your invisible cloak at least once a month, you can't do a thing by yourself. All the board members or a majority of them have to agree to an action. Then there is the situation pointed out by one particular board member. "I was elected for three years and then for another term. But, in the long run my tenure is subject to the whims of the public. The teachers and the administrators, by and large, have lifetime tenure. They'll be here long after I'm gone."

Does this mean that board members have to walk on cracked eggs? Of course not, but it does mean that the relationship between board and employees requires a realistic view of each party's role. Standing as a buffer between the two is the superintendent.

He is the transmitter of policy from the board to the staff, and the funnel of news and complaints from the staff to the board. Once this line of communication is clogged or destroyed, the entire school system may be divided. The relationship between board and superintendent is very delicate.

Here's an example of how trouble starts. An overzealous board member wanted to tour the schools. He asked the permission of the superintendent. (You don't have to do this, but it's a good idea to show your administrator the courtesy.) During the walk he smiled at teachers, said, "Good morning," and walked around trying to gain some understanding of what takes place in a school. At the close of the day he went to see the superintendent to "talk things over."

They chatted quietly until the superintendent said, "I understand you wanted to know why the new mats weren't being used in the high school gym."

"Gee, I forgot all about that," replied the board member. "It was just a point of interest at the moment."

The underground—and every institution, business, and industry has one—had already sent word along that this nosey board member was asking questions. The point is that every time you move through the schools or ask questions, it will be reported to the superintendent. Harmless as your inquiries may be, they will be seen as meaningful and perhaps extraordinary.

Should you stay out of the schools? Absolutely not! The schools are your responsibility and you should visit them as often as possible. Ask all the questions you want, but don't come roaring into the superintendents' office and tell him how to run the schools. Use your information as background. You can do this successfully if your administrative team has ensured that an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual assistance permeates your school system.

Probably at this point you can begin to see the significance of selecting an appropriate superintendent. His (or her) importance will evidence itself in a number of ways. The superintendent conducts the day-to-day operations of the schools and you, as an individual school board member, should never go over his head to effect a change in operations. He is truly the man in the middle and deserves all your backing and support because he serves the total school community—board, staff and students.

Negotiations

Nowhere is the tenuousness of the superintendent's position demonstrated more clearly than during negotiations with the teachers. He actually conducts the meeting and must reconcile the educational and fiscal responsibilities of the board on the one hand, with the aspirations and professional careers of the faculty on the other. His background undoubtedly includes teaching experience, but now he is an administrator bound to carry out the edicts of the board. The only hope for success, and it does exist, is to somehow remove the "adversary" nature of negotiations. To effect this change requires the skill of a judge, the devotion of a nurse, and the dedication of a scientist.

While you are waiting for someone with these characteristics to come along there are certain measures which every board member can adopt. One strategy commonly used by school boards is to declare certain issues raised by teachers to be "non-negotiable." This means, quite simply, that the subject is closed and can only be decided by the board. It's a great idea, but it's one which the teacher's union is bound to reject. Taking refuge in this expression is tantamount to burying your head in the sand, a position assumed by some boards, and unfortunately one which leaves a considerable portion of the anatomy exposed. If boards are to be effective they must stand up straight and fight.

The actual battle itself used to be fought by those members of the board who seemed the "toughest bar-

gainers." Thus, during negotiations the teachers would be represented by their chosen "professional negotiator," against two board members, and the superintendent would conduct the meeting. Needless to say, boards have since realized they, too, need professional help with negotiations. The costs, ranging up to fifty or sixty dollars an hour, are relatively small. An edge here, a concession there, and a slightly different wording elsewhere will more than compensate for the expense of a negotiator. One of the biggest advantages of using professional negotiators is that any fights, disagreements, or disruptions center on the negotiators and not on the board or the teachers. Both parties can return to the business of education without "loss of face."

During the past five years the unions have placed reams of contractual material in the hands of their local affiliates. Many boards, caught by surprise, and determined to go it alone, tried to cope with the overwhelming problem of comprehensive negotiations. The tide is turning as more and more boards seek professional guidance and counter with demands of their own. Bargaining or negotiating has now taken on a more professional air as both sides jockey for position. Bear in mind, your negotiator will do only what you tell him to do. He has little authority, only the power of persuasion over you, his client, and you can dictate the attitude or pose he wishes to strike during the negotiating period.

If you can step outside of your role as a board member you will recognize that "the board and the teachers are unnatural enemies." It seems ridiculous that two parties devoted to the same goals and aims should struggle year after year over the negotiating table. Anything you can do to mitigate animosities and otherwise make this time run more smoothly will be a feather in your boardsmanship cap.

Contract Administration

It seems almost superfluous to remind board members that, once a contract has been signed, it must be enforced. You may rest assured that employees will scrupulously guard their gains and adhere to the letter

of the contract with regard to grievable items. Don't be upset that they are determined to solidify their position, and don't take these attempts to set the stage for further gains as a personal attack.

To ensure that the board, and consequently the public, benefits from gains you have achieved in negotiations, the board should appoint someone to oversee all the points in the contract which are important to you. In smaller school districts the superintendent will be expected to carry out this function. A board workshop, or several sessions of board workshops during the year, might be devoted to a review of the existing contract, and a forward look to the next negotiating time.

A note of caution: If contractual items are not enforced, if the board in its magnaminity sees fit to be less than arduous in the enforcement of the contract, it will establish a precedent. Non-enforcement may become grounds for deleting items from the contract and therefore cause the board to lose valuable ground.

Evaluation and Training

Few areas in education are as delicate as evaluation. Take teachers. As you review how your teachers are evaluated you will probably find a check list referring to how well the teacher plans each day, the appearance of the room, general attitude in the class and a whole list of non-essential information. In industry these attributes are called "inputs." What we have to know to honestly evaluate a teachers' performance is "outputs."

In evaluating a teacher forget about trivialities—how well the teacher dresses, or whether the room is clean, or the shades drawn to a proper level. Examine the educational growth of the students, the results of the teachers' efforts. If the level of student performance in a given subject shows a month of growth for a month of classroom work, then the teacher is doing the job he is paid to do. If the youngsters do not achieve those performance levels, then something is wrong.

The battle over how to draw up proper evaluative instruments has been raging for years. On the one hand the teachers unions claim they want better evaluative

tools. On the other, boards have been confused by the magnitude of educational jargon and fail to grasp the simple fact that what must be measured are results, not attributes.

Here is a pragmatic example of what we are talking about. Second grade students enter the class reading at level 2.0. One objective of that class teacher should be that by the end of the school year the youngsters will be reading at level 3.0. If they are reading at 2.8, something is wrong. If they are reading at 3.4, maybe the teacher deserves a bonus (merit pay). In fact, maybe all salaries should be geared to the performance of the children in the classroom. (That thought will raise a lot of hackles.)

The point is that all evaluation should be tied to performance. And evaluation should include everyone —the administrative team, special teachers, child study team, maintenance people, and even the board itself. Do you think your performance should be evaluated? Why not? You start each year with goals and objectives (go back to the beginnings of boardsmanship) and your efforts to attain them must be evaluated so that you will know how well you have performed.

There is a tremendous benefit to this type of thinking if the measurement of success is the main focus. You don't win or lose, you achieve degrees of success. If this year a teacher reaches only ninety percent of his (or her) goals, then next year he may do better. If the board accomplishes only eighty percent of its stated objectives, next year may be the time to zip ahead and improve. There are no degrees of failure, only measures of success.

Which brings us quite naturally to the next phase, training. When you can determine degrees of success you can also determine where help or training is needed. The teacher who did not reach the results agreed to in terms of math skills can be "invited" to participate in training sessions which will improve his skills in teaching math. And the board members can be "invited" to participate in those training sessions which will improve boardsmanship skills. We live in a world which revolves

around education; as board members we are absorbed in education; why not use education to improve our own performance and that of our employees?

In-service training is an important and growing aspect of education and industry. Full-day seminars, weekend retreats, scheduled speakers, college credit classes, and non-credit courses are part and parcel of keeping up with the changing nature of education. The board should sponsor training programs for teachers, administrators, maintenance people, foodservice staff, and not least of all—for itself. Continued education is a continuing need.

Personnel Matters

School boards are constantly dealing with personnel matters. Should a teacher be given tenure? Shall we rehire a teachers aide? Is the board secretary doing the job for which he was engaged? These deliberations have to do with the career and future careers of a number of people.

By and large, personnel problems are dealt with in private sessions of the board. Action must still be taken at a public meeting but, generally speaking, the details of the board's deliberations will not be revealed to the public, only its decisions. To a large extent this is done to protect the individual. It also permits the board a degree of flexibility in dealing with personnel matters.

Goal Setting

Throughout this book we have stressed and re-stressed the idea of goal setting. There is no fear of being redundant, because the urgency of determining where you want your school district to go deserves constant emphasis.

To help you with the establishment of goals, the New Jersey School Boards Association sponsors conferences, meetings, and seminars on the subject. In addition the NJSBA conducts gatherings, training sessions, county-wide workshops and an annual state-wide workshop on the new horizons in education. No one

tries to tell you what to do, they only point out the many wonderful things which can be done and remind you that you have the power to do them in your district.

Boards ought to visit other, distant school districts for discussions and comparisons. Sitting around a table in an informal manner can yield great insight into what someone else is doing which might be applicable to your own schools. Reading the many magazines (New Jersey School Leader, American School Board Journal, School Management, and Nation's Schools to mention a a few) devoted to education will keep you informed and establish a base for your own thinking.

Then, of course, there is the business of "selling" your goals and objectives to your staff and to your community. Perhaps the notion of selling is crass. If you can think of a better way to describe the process of convincing your peers and your community that new board programs should be implemented—fine. The essential point is that if you want to meet with a modicum of success you need as many people on your side as possible. A single story in the newspaper is hardly going to do the job. You need a planned campaign to "persuade, convince and sell," your various publics.

There is a fascinating new concept abroad in the land called "Management by Objectives." Some schools and many industries have adopted this management method. You may recall our earlier description of the process. Set goals, establish methods to reach these goals, implement the methods, and then evaluate the progress. It's as simple as determining where you want to go, figuring out how you want to get there, going, and finally measuring the success of your journey.

Remember, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there."

Good board members are trained. Few of us are born with the skills for competent boardsmanship. We learn, through a variety of ways, how to perform our jobs in the best possible manner. However, we begin our tenure at the top of the educational hierarchy and we control the lives and activities of a great number of professional and service personnel. Therefore, it is

expedient that we rapidly acquire the skills of boardsmanship. The effect of authority suddenly thrust upon them can be deleterious to some people. Don't think of yourself as a boss. Adopt an attitude of mutual cooperation with your employees and keep in mind that you all are supposedly headed in the same direction.

To ascertain that everyone is working toward common goals it is necessary to have a number of review techniques and evaluative tools. Don't be afraid to use these. You might even show the way by establishing similar techniques to measure your own performance. Modern management systems seek in a variety of ways to keep management and employees "on the same side of the fence." If everyone is committed to the same set of objectives, then they ought not be pulling against one another.

One last thought, boards are supposed to be leaders. Your style of leadership may be to take a front position, or you may prefer to be the kind of leader who pushes from behind, or you may feel that the leader should be in the middle of the pack. It's not terribly important where you position yourself. What is important is that you recognize where you want to go, and how you want to get there.

Chapter IX

The Flow of Educational Policy

The origins of education policy stem from the U.S. Constitution. By not dealing with education, the Constitution delegated to the states the power to determine their own educational policies under the doctrine of "implied powers." This is significant because the same concept is applied to education at the local level. Those policies not determined at the state level are "implied" to exist at the local level.

What does all this mean to you as a board member? It positions you in the educational continuum. The state makes policies, these are implemented by state officials, and the balance of policy-making is left to individual local boards. The authority of the local school boards is derived from the state legislature, it does not flow from your community. You are, in a sense, a state representative serving at the discretion of the local community, but your power comes from the Legislature.

Every year the State Legislature is confronted with a number of bills directly related to education which can affect the operation of your school district. To carry out laws passed, the state has established a Department of Education.

Interestingly enough, the state Department of Education is headed by a State Board of Education, which is quite similar to the local boards of education. Its twelve members are drawn from counties throughout the state. You may well qualify for appointment by the governor to the State Board of Education. Before becoming official, your appointment must have the "advice and consent" of the New Jersey Senate.

To carry out the functions of the State Board of Education, the state has created the position of commissioner of education. (Note the similarity to your local board, which has a superintendent of schools to carry

out your functions.) The commissioner is appointed for five years and his appointment, too, is subject to the advice and consent of the New Jersey Senate. He is the chief executive officer of the State Board of Education.

As we have seen at the local level, many decisions are made of an operational or interpretive nature. These decisions have the effect of law, or rather the extension of the law as enunciated by the New Jersey State Legislature. Decisions made by the commissioner take precedence over decisions made by local school boards. He is the second highest authority on the way to the top.

The decisions of the commissioner may be reviewed by the State Board of Education. And even the State Board is subject to challenge in the courts. Thus, an on-going system of major policy-making, interpretation and implementation flows from the state to the local levels.

There is a prevailing philosophy that problems are best solved at the local level. When these problems grow and get involved in the legal process, they come under the scrutiny of higher authority. Here's an example:

A teacher has a grievance. The problem goes to the principal of the school building. If it cannot be resolved the question next goes to the superintendent. If that doesn't answer the question then the local board of education will review the decision. The next step is the commissioner of education. After that, the teacher may go to the State Board of Education and then on to the courts.

An example of the flow of legislative authority is the passage of a law. The commissioner sends word along as to how the law must be enforced at the local level. You and your board act accordingly. If someone wants to challenge the law, that is his right and there are legal procedures available to do this.

YOU and Educational Policy

One trouble with policies established at a high level is that they may not be operational, or they may not serve the purpose for which they were intended. You

and your colleagues are probably the best judges of the validity of policy. You are in the position of seeing policies implemented on a day-to-day basis; at the same time you can appreciate the directions and intentions of the higher legislative authority. Because of this double view, you should make known your feelings on educational issues often and persuasively.

Before you start a crusade, you should be informed about the legislative process. Must reading for every school board member is a pamphlet produced by the New Jersey School Boards Association, "School Boards and the Legislative Process." This booklet contains a concise, step-by-step procedure by which an idea is translated into law. What this monograph says about school law is equally applicable to all laws passed in the state of New Jersey.

To keep you informed on a monthly basis, your association also produces a Legislative Bulletin and a Legislative Newsletter. These two publications will keep you abreast of pending legislation and the position of your association as transmitted by the Delegate Assembly—which consists of school board members representing all districts in the state.

Perhaps a word about the New Jersey School Boards Association will add to your perspective. Under the law, all school boards are represented at the state level by the NJSBA. Each board, through a system of representation, is afforded the opportunity to relay its wishes and attitudes to the association. As with any association, financial support comes from the membership, and the direction of the activities is invested in a group of highly skilled professionals. This group is presided over by the Board of Directors, a group drawn from local school boards, headed by the officers—a president, three vice presidents, the immediate past president, and the executive director.

The NJSBA has a number of arms or divisions. It has a Legislative Committee which examines and takes positions on pending legislation. Guidance for this committee is provided by the association's attorneys who are steeped in New Jersey school law. In addition, each

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school board may present proposed legislation to the Delegate Assembly for initiation and support by the NJSBA. The proposals submitted by local school boards are detailed in the meetings of the Delegate Assemblies and published in the New Jersey School Leader so that every school board member in the state may know what is being supported and what positions are being assumed.

If all this sounds like a "lobby" group in Trenton, that is exactly right. Teachers have their representatives in the state capital, why should not the school boards be represented there? It is part of the democratic process and has actually been recognized and sanctioned by the legislature. When the professional staff of the NJSBA express their concerns to elected assemblymen and state senators, they carry the weight of the entire school boards association.

For the individual school board member, YOU, there are other ways to project your feelings about pending and proposed legislation. You should be active in your county school boards association. Obviously, an assemblage of twenty or thirty school districts carries more impact than one school district. Thus, you multiply the importance of the school board position. Moreover, at least one member of your school board should report on pending legislation at your monthly workshop or meeting. Since school board activities are so far-reaching, this task should be covered, and adequately, by a board member who is knowledgeable in this area and who finds it stimulating.

As an individual you can also have an effect by writing, calling, or otherwise contacting your elected state representatives and making your desires known. Bear in mind that this is a healthy, wholesome, and truly democratic process. You have every right, in fact you have an obligation, to express yourself to your elected representatives.

An essential part of your job as a board member is being involved in those laws which affect your work. Just as every person wants to be part of a decision-making process, so the active board member wants to

participate in effecting changes in the laws by which schools are run. If you abdicate this opportunity to make your wishes and feelings known, then don't complain later when laws are passed which make your job more difficult. The time to get involved is immediately.

There is little magic in how a law is proposed, travels through committee, comes to the floor, is passed, and then reaches the governor's desk. All along the way you have an opportunity to tell your state officials how you feel either as an individual, a board member, a member of a county-wide organization, or as a member of the New Jersey School Boards Association.

While this segment of boardsmanship has been reserved to the final chapter, this by no means is intended to diminish the importance of legislation with regard to school law. There is an element of security in knowing that a professional staff is active at the state level and pours information and advice to the local school boards. But, as your tenure on the board will soon reveal, every board member has what he feels is a special interest or expertise, something unique to offer. When tasks and committee assignments are assigned, someone should surface who wants to be involved in legislation. A single individual, overseeing and guiding a school board along legislative paths can make a major contribution and have long-time effects on public education.

Epilogue

If you have come this far, you are entitled to a summation, a putting together in a few words of the essence of boardmanship.

What is boardsmanship? It is the human side of being a school board member, the way you conduct yourself, how you carry out the important work of guiding education in your community.

When do you engage in boardsmanship? Probably your entire life style will be affected as you make use of the limitless possibilities of group dynamics.

How do you carry out boardsmanship? Three simple rules will guide you. Gather the facts, listen to the various points of view, and then express yourself. Honesty and openness are complimentary factors.

Where do you use boardsmanship? At workshops, public meetings, walking through the schools, at home, and in your daily life.

Why do you use boardsmanship? Because it is the most effective way to succeed in the work before you. It is an all-pervasive technique for acommplishing educational goals.

Who uses boardsmanship? Everyone, to some degree. But the more adept you are and the better prepared, the stronger you will be as a member of your school board.

As a final word, if you question the value of your contribution to your board, keep in mind that each individual has something valuable to offer. Every child, every parent, every member of the community, and certainly every board member is an asset to education. Though the road may at times seem unclear, the opportunities to add to educational excellence abound. We know you will do your share.